



*Sgt. Crew Gill, a military police officer assigned to the 3rd Expeditionary Sustainment Command, firefighters from the Fire Department of the City of New York, and a Red Cross member help unload meals ready-to-eat from a military flatbed on Oct. 2, 2017, in Vieques, Puerto Rico. (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Donna Davis)*





# Mission Command in a DSCA Event

■ By Brig. Gen. Christopher Mohan, Col. Patrick E. Taylor, Maj. Greg Darden, and Maj. Tammy Johnson

During the 2017 hurricane season, U.S. Army North (ARNORTH) directed the 3rd Expeditionary Sustainment Command (ESC) headquarters to have mission command over sustainment operations for the relief efforts following three devastating hurricanes: Harvey in Texas, Irma in Florida, and Maria in Puerto Rico. Unlike offensive, defensive, and stability tasks in decisive action, sustainment is the main effort during defense support of civil authorities (DSCA) events.

Prior to the hurricane season, the 3rd ESC participated in ARNORTH training exercises to prepare for DSCA operations. The headquarters developed a scaled operational approach for DSCA support, which allowed the 3rd ESC to extend its operational reach with a minimal footprint. This scaled approach ranged from employing one eight-Soldier sustainment assessment team (SAT) to using the entire ESC staff.

The plan to support ARNORTH was tested during the previous hurricane season, which had consecutive devastating hurricanes that required a unified government response and the

ESC's full complement of distributed mission command capabilities.

## The ESC's Assignment

The 3rd ESC is assigned to the U.S. Northern Command and is under the operational control of ARNORTH. When deployed, the 3rd ESC is the operational sustainment headquarters for ARNORTH during all DSCA operations in a designated joint operations area (JOA). The ESC's mission is to provide mission command for all sustainment operations in support of Title 10 forces operating in the JOA. The command was the first active duty ESC to be given this mission.

Previously, ARNORTH relied on an active duty sustainment brigade to conduct this mission. That brigade reported directly to the theater sustainment command. The 3rd ESC's unique command relationship with ARNORTH required it to provide Defense Readiness Reporting System-Army information and also a training brief to the commander.

## Training Plan and Exercises

The 3rd ESC's assignment to the U.S. Northern Command presented a new mission task, and the ESC's

# The 3rd Expeditionary Sustainment Command deployed as the sustainment headquarters for defense support of civil authorities events during the relief efforts for Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria.

leaders quickly realized their training plan was focused solely on offensive and defensive operations. Having to conduct mission command during a DSCA event required relationships with other services and government organizations.

ARNORTH conducts several exercises each year that test its response to a request to support civil authorities. To better understand the mission set, the 3rd ESC revamped its training plan and incorporated DSCA exercises into its long-range training plan.

The modified training plan required the command to assume some risk when XVIII Airborne Corps exercises overlapped with ARNORTH exercises. To mitigate risk, the ESC included the 4th Infantry Division Sustainment Brigade into its training plan since it was also under the operational control of ARNORTH.

## Mission Command Packages

The 3rd ESC knew it could conduct its mission almost flawlessly, but it also knew that every DSCA event was not the same. The headquarters had to be flexible enough to respond quickly but still have endurance to support a long-term event.

The ESC uses a scalable approach to conduct mission command. Its mission command packages are the SATs. These teams are light; they rely on rental cars for transportation and the defense coordinating officer (DCO) for lodging at the support site. DCOs liaise with federal, state, and local agencies and coordinate DSCA within their assigned regions. The SATs advise the regional DCO on military capability as it pertains to logistics.

Each SAT is made up of Soldiers from the support operations (SPO) branch and a communications specialist from the G-6 section equipped with a Broadband Global Area Network terminal and a satellite phone. One person on the team is a government purchase card holder, another a member of the operational contract

support team, and another a mobility representative. The officer-in-charge is typically a SPO planner.

The team is also augmented with human resources personnel to conduct in-processing of personnel entering the JOA. The SATs have personnel from the 3rd ESC SPO Human Resources Operations Branch to oversee this process.

The SATs are essentially the 3rd ESC's "eyes forward" and become the forward command post. The ESC maintains three teams and uses a red, amber, green training cycle to ensure they are deployable at all times. Assigned sustainment units report information directly to the 3rd ESC's main command post at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, but liaise with the forward headquarters.

If the response requires a more robust headquarters, the ESC can deploy its tactical command post (TAC). The TAC consists of 32 Soldiers and is augmented with a communications package from a supporting signal brigade.

This element is manned by members of the ESC staff and SPO to provide mission command for sustainment elements forward. When operational, the TAC is the forward headquarters, and sustainment units in the JOA report directly to it.

During the 2017 hurricane season, the 3rd ESC deployed in support of civil authorities to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria as the sustainment headquarters in the designated JOA. Each response required a different mission command package, but the 3rd ESC was postured to respond quickly and have the flexibility to surge if needed.

## Hurricane Harvey

The ESC initially deployed one SAT to link with the DCO and begin the reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) process at Joint Base San Antonio, Texas. As more sustainment units entered the JOA, the ESC realized a more robust command post was required to provide mission command



for sustainment operations.

The ESC deployed its TAC to Texas and set up operations at Joint Base San Antonio. The TAC immediately tied in with the ARNORTH staff and with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The SAT continued with its RSOI mission, and the TAC assumed mission command of sustainment operations in support of Title 10 forces operating in the JOA.

The TAC began to collect logistics status reports and develop requirements. Using the Defense Logistics Agency and other strategic enablers, the TAC began sustaining Title 10 units. Once the Texas National Guard mobilized enough assets to assume the mission, the 3rd ESC personnel redeployed to Fort Bragg and conducted an after action review (AAR).

### **Hurricane Irma**

Almost as soon as the 3rd ESC packed up its gear and conducted the AAR for Harvey, another hurricane moved toward the mainland with Florida in its crosshairs. The AAR revealed that the ESC was slow to deploy initial capability during Hurricane Harvey. ARNORTH had sent an advanced echelon (ADVON) to Florida to coordinate with the DCO prior to the hurricane's landfall. The ESC followed suit and immediately deployed two SATs.

Both SATs linked up with the ARNORTH ADVON and the DCO and eventually were split between Jacksonville and Orlando. The SATs' primary task was to conduct site surveys and execute RSOI of Title 10 forces coming into the JOA. The Florida National Guard responded quickly, and the requirement for Title 10 capability was significantly reduced.

The SATs used their government purchase cards and provided sustainment support to the Title 10 forces that mobilized to support the response. The SATs managed the flow of sustainment into the JOA, and the main command post at Fort

Bragg conducted mission command from the headquarters.

Communications were essential. Using a Broadband Global Area Network terminal and cell phones, the ESC maintained situational awareness between Fort Bragg and the teams in Florida. The ESC provided nightly updates to the ARNORTH commander in Texas. When the Florida National Guard mobilized and assumed the mission, both SATs redeployed to Fort Bragg.

### **Hurricane Maria**

Hurricane Maria proved to be the most devastating storm of the hurricane season. After Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico, the commonwealth's governor asked for federal assistance. FEMA was immediately dispatched to the island, and the Department of Defense (DOD) was asked to provide support.

The 3rd ESC's initial support package consisted of three SATs and an ADVON. The SATs immediately established RSOI operations for all Title 10 units, and the ADVON established the TAC headquarters alongside FEMA and ARNORTH. Once the headquarters was established, the commanding general and personnel from across the ESC staff deployed and began operations.

As the mission expanded, the 3rd ESC command post grew to twice the size of the original TAC configuration. Leveraging the main command post at Fort Bragg, the 3rd ESC built in flexibility to prolong its endurance. At the height of the DOD support, the 3rd ESC's task organization included an active duty sustainment brigade, a medical brigade, a combat support hospital, and other sustainment units and organizations.

Because Puerto Rico is an island, managing the supply chain and synchronizing distribution assets was critical. Competition for distribution assets required the ESC to continually synchronize DOD, FEMA, and Army Corps of Engineers cargo movements. Both air and sea ports were challenging because the ESC

was in constant competition with nongovernmental organizations and commercial enterprises.

Communications were the ESC's most significant challenge to mission command. With little to no commercial communication infrastructure, the ESC had to rely on tactical communications assets. As the size of the response grew, competition for bandwidth stressed the ESC's ability to communicate effectively with subordinate units across the island.

DSCA is considerably different than other decisive action tasks. The 3rd ESC's ability to quickly identify key tasks and adjust its training plan was critical to its success during the 2017 hurricane season. Scalable and flexible distributed mission command capability was essential to prolong endurance and extend the unit's operational reach.

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